U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) Update #1

Prepared by the AHAR Research Team   **October 2004**

Abt Associates Inc.
The University of Pennsylvania Center for Mental Health Policy and Services Research

With the release of the final HMIS Data and Technical Standards, the AHAR research team is preparing for data collection activities that will lead to the first Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress in 2005. The report will analyze Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) data collected from a nationally representative sample of communities. For the first AHAR, the goal is to produce an unduplicated count and profile of homeless persons using emergency shelter and transitional housing within each sample community. Aggregated information from the sample communities will be used to develop a descriptive profile of the homeless population using services throughout the nation.

Beginning in October 2004, the AHAR research team will send regular updates about the AHAR project through HUD's hmisinfo@hud.gov list-serve. These updates will provide important information to communities that are participating in the AHAR project as well as inform others who are interested in this effort.

This first communication is presented in a Question & Answer format. We provide written responses to a number of questions received since the publication of the final HMIS Data and Technical Standards Notice and during the 2004 HMIS Conference in Chicago.

In all, there are 80 Community Development Block Grant jurisdictions *(or sample sites)* located within 71 Continuums of Care (CoC) participating in the research project. Most of the jurisdictions are central cities (42 sites), a few are other cities with more than 50,000 people (9 sites), some are urban counties (15 sites), and some are in rural areas (14 sites). *If you are not sure whether your community is an AHAR sample site, please check the list of sample sites at the end of this update.*

For more basic information on the AHAR, please see the Frequently Asked Questions posted on HUD's website: http://www.hud.gov/offices/cpd/homeless/hmis/standards/hmisfaq.pdf. (AHAR updates will also be posted on the HUD website.)

KEY QUESTIONS ABOUT THE AHAR PROJECT

1. What is the schedule for collecting HMIS data for the AHAR research project?

After consulting with sample sites and HMIS software solution providers at the Chicago conference, the final schedule is as follows. The first AHAR will be based on information collected for a three-month period, from *February 1, 2005 through April 30, 2005.* The research team will work with participating sites to produce aggregate data from that 3-month period during May and June 2005. The first AHAR report will be completed by December 2005. Subsequent AHARs will each cover a 12-month period.

Finalization of the HMIS data standards took longer than expected and, as a result, the schedule for the AHAR research project has been adjusted.

2. How will the data be provided to the research team?

Data will be collected in aggregate form from participating sites using table shells developed by the research team. The aggregated data must be based on an unduplicated count of homeless persons using emergency shelters or transitional housing in each community. The research team will provide assistance to the sites on how to perform the calculations needed to fill out the table shells.

By sample site request only, the research team will accept client-level data and complete the table shells. For these sites, the research team and representatives from the community will develop a Memorandum of Understanding describing the approved uses of the data, including privacy and confidentiality and data handling procedures. Client-level data should be exported from the HMIS application into a comma separated value format to give the research team the ability to generate aggregate data for the AHAR table shells. However, we are not encouraging submission of client-level data in lieu of aggregate data because, in producing the table shells, local HMIS staff will enhance their capacity to produce an unduplicated count of homeless persons and to generate local reports on homelessness.

3. Our sample site represents just a small part of our Continuum of Care. Can we provide data for the entire Continuum of Care?

In some cases, the selected sample site is conterminous with the CoC (e.g., the City of Chicago and the Chicago CoC). In other cases, the selected sample site is a smaller jurisdiction within the larger CoC (e.g., Great Falls as part of the State of Montana CoC).

Where the sample site is a smaller jurisdiction within the larger CoC, the CoC may choose to submit data for the entire CoC. However, the CoC data for the areas outside the sample site must

be submitted as a separate report from the sample site report. It is very important that the data for areas outside the sample site be submitted separately, because only the data from the sample site can be used to make generalizations about homelessness in places for which we do not have data.

4. How do we know if our site has adequate data to be included in the first AHAR?

In order to be included in the first AHAR, a site must: 1) have an operational HMIS that meets a minimum threshold for bed coverage (at least 50 percent) for the entire three month period covered by the report; and 2) be able to produce reliable data based on the final HMIS data standards released on July 30, 2004.

By bed coverage, we mean the number of shelter beds offered by providers participating in the HMIS within the sample site divided by the total number of shelter beds in the sample site. For example, a sample site that has 30 beds in the HMIS out of 40 total beds in the sample site has a bed coverage of 75 percent (or $30 \div 40$). To be included in the first AHAR, a sample site will need to achieve a minimum 50 percent bed coverage ratio for at least one of the following four categories:

1. Individuals beds in Emergency Shelters
2. Family beds in Emergency Shelters
3. Individual beds in Transitional Housing
4. Family beds in Transitional Housing.

Sample sites will be asked to complete the AHAR table shells even if the bed coverage is below the threshold for one or more of the four categories. Sample sites *will not* be dropped from the AHAR sample if they are unable to meet the bed coverage thresholds for any of the four categories. We anticipate that these sites will be providing data for subsequent AHARs.

To ensure that the data are reliable, sites need to conduct data quality checks throughout the data collection period. Site staff should be checking for:

- *Data completeness*. Are participating providers entering information on all clients served and is the information on each client complete? Is information entered into the HMIS in a timely manner? Are all personal identifiers required for unduplication complete?
- *Data accuracy*. Are data consistent with the HMIS data standards and entered correctly?
- *Data consistency*. Are data completeness and accuracy consistent across time?

Reliable data also depend on staff training prior and throughout HMIS implementation.

5. *While our community has not been selected as a sample site, we have a well-developed HMIS and would like to participate in the AHAR. Can we provide data from our community for the AHAR?*

We encourage any community that has achieved 75 percent bed coverage in one or more of the categories listed in Question 4 (e.g., individual beds in emergency shelters) to provide data for the AHAR. The data from non-sample communities will improve the national estimates in the AHAR and will therefore provide a more complete picture of homelessness in America.

The 75 percent bed coverage ratio has been tested by the AHAR research team and has been used in previous research on homelessness. It will be the minimum bed coverage threshold for future AHARs.

If your community is not a sample site but would like to participate in the first AHAR, please contact Alvaro Cortes (301-634-1857 or alvaro_cortes@abtassoc.com).

6. *What information will participating sites need to provide for the AHAR?*

For the first AHAR, sites will be asked to complete AHAR table shells (developed by the research team) that are based solely on the universal data elements from the final HMIS Notice. The AHAR table shells will only include information on persons who use homeless residential services (i.e., emergency shelter and/or transitional housing) during the data collection period. That is, information on persons who use outreach programs, supportive service only programs or permanent housing will not be included in the first AHAR.

The information presented in the table shells will be in aggregate form but must be based on an unduplicated count of homeless individuals and persons in families at the local level.

7. *When will the AHAR table shells be available? In what format will the table shells be distributed?*

The table shells will be distributed via HUD's list-serve in October 2004. They will be provided to sites in an Excel spreadsheet. Excel software was chosen because it is widely available, enables some calculations to be embedded in the spreadsheet, and can be easily integrated with data from other sites for analysis. If staff from sample sites do not have access to Excel software, they can manually enter data on hard copies of the spreadsheets and staff from the research team will enter the information into Excel.

8. How will the information from these table shells be used?

The information will be aggregated across sample sites to produce the first Annual Homeless Assessment Report. This report will address five key questions:

1. How many people use homeless residential services? This question will be addressed by obtaining an unduplicated count of persons who are homeless and use emergency shelters or transitional housing.

2. Who uses homeless residential services? The AHAR will present a demographic profile of homeless persons, including children, in the United States.

3. Where do users of homeless residential services receive these services and where did they live before? We will look at different regions of the country and different types of jurisdictions (e.g., central cities and suburbs) where people receive homeless residential services, and at users' self-reported prior living situations.

4. What are the patterns of homelessness and of homeless residential service use? We will describe the numbers of homeless single adults, persons in households with children, and unaccompanied youth using emergency and transitional facilities. We will also show the average length of stay in emergency shelters and transitional housing for different types of users.

5. What is the current capacity for housing homeless people and how much is utilized?

9. There are no homeless assistance providers operating within our sample site. Are we still part of the AHAR?

Because a majority of sites were randomly selected for the study, there are some sample communities that do not have any homeless service providers. These sites will remain in the research sample and, for statistical purposes, simply represent other communities across the country that similarly do not have any homeless service providers. These sites will not be asked for data. However, if a homeless service provider becomes operational within the jurisdiction in the future, data will be requested at that time from the sample community.

10. Who should I contact with questions about the AHAR, the HMIS data standards, or HMIS implementation or technical assistance?

Questions about the AHAR
Please direct AHAR questions to:

Alvaro Cortes, alvaro_cortes@abtassoc.com (301-634-1857) or
Mary Joel Holin, mary_holin@abtassoc.com (301-634-1736)
Abt Associates Inc.
4550 Montgomery Avenue, Suite 800 N.
Bethesda, Maryland 20814-3343

Questions about the HMIS data and technical standards
If you have questions about the standards, please e-mail hmisinfo@hud.gov.

Questions about HMIS implementation/technical assistance
Technical assistance is available to communities that are implementing or planning to implement local homeless management information systems. To submit an e-request for technical assistance visit www.hmis.info.

80 SAMPLE SITES – SEPTEMBER 30, 2004

STATE	SAMPLE SITE	CoC
AZ	FLAGSTAFF	Rural Arizona CoC
AZ	PHOENIX	Maricopa CoC
CA	FRESNO	Fresno/Madera CoC
CA	LOS ANGELES	County of Los Angeles, Ca
CA	LOS ANGELES COUNTY	County of Los Angeles, Ca
CA	MARIN COUNTY	Marin County
CA	MISSION VIEJO	County of Orange, Ca
CA	MODESTO	Stanislaus County Housing & Support Services Collaborative
CA	MORENO VALLEY	County of Riverside
CA	PASADENA	Pasadena Community Development Commission
CA	PICO RIVERA	County of Los Angeles, Ca
CA	SAN DIEGO	City of San Diego Consortium
CA	SAN FRANCISCO	City and County of San Francisco
CA	SEASIDE	County of Monterey
CO	ADAMS COUNTY	The Metropolitan Denver Homeless Initiative
CO	CROWLEY COUNTY	State of Colorado
CT	HARTFORD	Hartford CoC
CT	STRATFORD	Bridgeport CoC
DC	WASHINGTON	District of Columbia Homeless Services
DE	WILMINGTON	CoC Delaware
FL	DELTONA	Volusia County CoC
FL	MARION COUNTY	Ocala/Marion County CoC
FL	POLK COUNTY	Polk/Hardee/Highlands County CoC
FL	SARASOTA	Sarasota/Mantee CoC
GA	ATLANTA	Atlanta Tri- Jurisdictional
GA	AUGUSTA-RICHMOND	Augusta-Richmond County
GA	MACON COUNTY	Georgia CoC
GA	OCONEE COUNTY	Georgia CoC
IL	CHICAGO	Chicago CoC
IL	COOK COUNTY	Cook County CoC
KY	HARDIN COUNTY	Commonwealth of Kentucky CoC
LA	BOSSIER CITY	Northwest Louisiana
LA	SLIDELL	Slidell/Livingston/St. Helena
MA	ATTLEBORO	Greater Attleboro and Taunton CoC
MA	BOSTON	City of Boston
MD	MONTGOMERY COUNTY	Montgomery County, Maryland
MI	DETROIT	City of Detroit CoC
MI	FARMINGTON HILLS	Oakland County CoC
MI	LANSING	Lansing, East Lansing/Ingham County CoC
MI	MACOMB COUNTY	Macomb County CoC

STATE	SAMPLE SITE	CoC
MI	WASHTENAW COUNTY	Washtenaw County/Ann Arbor CoC
MN	HENNEPIN COUNTY	Minneapolis/Hennepin County CoC
MN	MOORHEAD	West Central Minnesota CoC
MN	NORMAN COUNTY	Northwest Minnesota CoC
MN	ROCHESTER	Southeast/South Central Minnesota Regional CoC
MN	ST PAUL	St. Paul/Ramsey County CoC
MN	WASHINGTON COUNTY	Washington County CoC
MS	HATTIESBURG	Mississippi Balance of State CoC
MS	HUMPHREYS COUNTY	Mississippi Balance of State CoC
MT	BILLINGS	State of Montana CoC
MT	GREAT FALLS	State of Montana CoC
NE	COUNCIL BLUFFS	City of Omaha
NJ	BERGEN COUNTY	Bergen County
NJ	BRICK TOWNSHIP	Ocean County CoC
NJ	CAMDEN	Camden City/Camden County
NV	CLARK COUNTY	Southern Nevada CoC
NY	GLENS FALLS	Saratoga County - City of Saratoga Springs
NY	ISLIP TOWN	Suffolk County CoC Group
NY	NEW YORK CITY	New York City Coalition/CoC
NY	NIAGARA FALLS	Niagara County CoC
NY	ONONDAGA COUNTY	Syracuse/Clay/Onondaga County CoC
OH	CLEVELAND	Cuyahoga County/Cleveland CoC
OH	LANCASTER	Ohio Balance of State
OH	PUTNAM COUNTY	Ohio Balance of State
OH	SPRINGFIELD	Ohio Balance of State
OK	MIDWEST CITY	State of Oklahoma
PA	LYCOMING COUNTY	Central-Harrisburg Region of Pennsylvania
PA	PHILADELPHIA	City of Philadelphia
PA	SNYDER COUNTY	Central-Harrisburg Region of Pennsylvania
PA	WESTMORELAND COUNTY	Westmoreland County
TX	DALLAS	Dallas Homeless CoC
TX	EL PASO	El Paso CoC
TX	HOUSTON	Houston/Harris County
VA	CHESTERFIELD COUNTY	Richmond CoC
VA	PORTSMOUTH	Portsmouth CoC
VT	CHITTENDEN COUNTY	Chittenden County
WA	ADAMS COUNTY	State of Washington CoC
WA	SEATTLE	Seattle-King County CoC
WA	SKAGIT COUNTY	State of Washington CoC
WI	FOREST COUNTY	State of Wisconsin CoC